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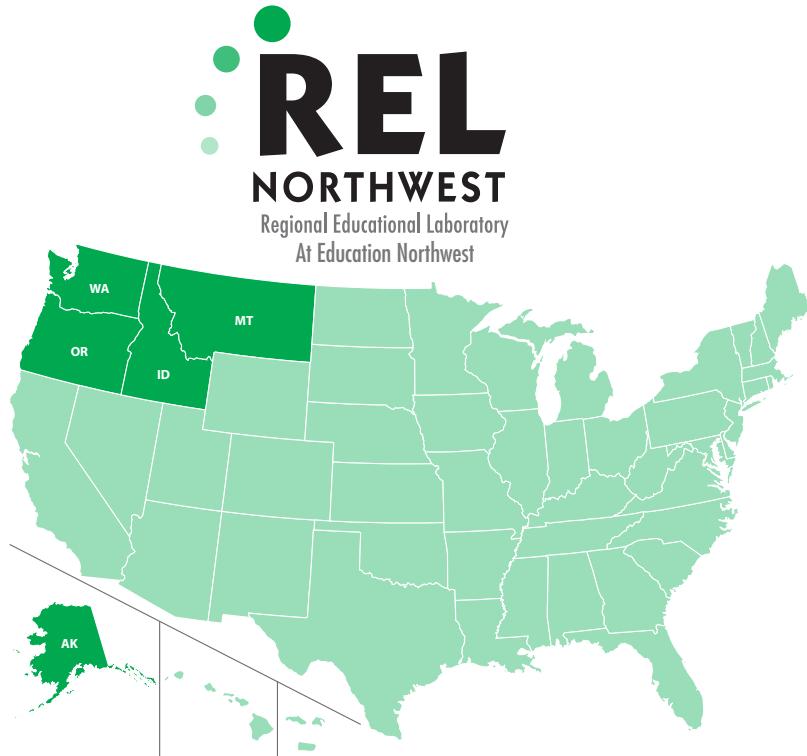
January 2012

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Issues & Answers is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

January 2012

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-06-CO-0016 by Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest administered by Education Northwest. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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Nishioka, V., Burke, A., and Deussen, T. (2012). *English Language proficiency levels of limited English proficient students in Idaho*. (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2012-No. 125). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

This report is available on the Regional Educational Laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

English language proficiency levels of limited English proficient students in Idaho

This study describes the proficiency levels of limited English proficient (LEP) students and LEP student subgroups on the Idaho English Language Assessment.

For more than a decade, limited English proficient (LEP) students have been the fastest-growing student population in U.S. schools (Boyle et al. 2010; Capps et al. 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires schools to ensure that highly qualified teachers provide effective instructional services that will result in measurable progress in both English language acquisition and academic progress for LEP students. To meet these requirements, state education agencies need focused and detailed data analyses of student performance to guide resource allocation, professional development, and instructional practices. The Idaho State Department of Education requested this study to learn more about the English proficiency of its population of LEP students by grade level and key LEP student subgroups.

The study examines the distribution of LEP students across five proficiency levels (beginning, advanced beginning, intermediate, early fluent, and fluent) on the Idaho English Language Assessment (IELA), the state's test of language proficiency administered each year to all LEP students. The IELA provides a holistic estimate of each student's English language proficiency level that reflects the student's ability to participate in a mainstream English language classroom.

The study also describes the distribution of students across three proficiency levels (beginning, advanced beginning/intermediate, and early fluent/fluent) for the five domains measured on the IELA: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. Results are reported for the five grade spans assessed by the IELA (kindergarten, grades 1–2, grades 3–5, grades 6–8, and grades 9–12) for the total LEP student population and for six LEP student subgroups based on gender, participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program, Spanish as the primary language, enrollment in a U.S. public school for the first time within the previous 12 months, migrant status, and enrollment in special education. Although the primary focus is on data for 2010 (the most recent year available), results for 2007 (the first year the assessment was administered in its current form) are included so that patterns over time can be identified.

In addition to showing whether LEP students' English proficiency has improved, IELA results can provide schools, districts, and the state with a picture of the distribution of students across proficiency levels. Understanding which students are at which level of English language proficiency can guide decisions about resource allocation, professional development, and instructional practice.

The report addresses two research questions:

- What is the distribution of LEP students across proficiency levels on the total IELA scale and its five domains?

- How does the distribution of proficiency levels differ across LEP student subgroups?

Key findings include the following:

- Most LEP students had an intermediate, early fluent, or fluent level of proficiency. Students at these levels can participate in classroom activities, although they still require support, particularly with the development of academic English.
- In both kindergarten and grades 1–12 in 2010, the proficiency levels with the smallest percentage of LEP students was at the beginning or advanced beginning levels of proficiency (16.4 percent in kindergarten and 7.6–9.3 percent of students in grades 1–12).
- In kindergarten, more than half (58 percent) of LEP students were at the early fluent or fluent proficiency level in 2010. More kindergarten LEP students were at the beginning level than at the advanced beginning level.
- In grades 1–12, the largest percentage of LEP students was at the early fluent or fluent proficiency level, the second largest percentage at the intermediate level, the third largest percentage at the advanced beginning level, and the smallest percentage at the beginning level.
- There were few differences in the proficiency levels of LEP students across the five IELA domains, with more than half of students at the early fluent/fluent level in each domain. In all grade spans except kindergarten (where the percentage was somewhat larger), fewer than 8 percent of students were at the beginning level in any domain. In elementary school, the writing domain had the largest percentage of students at the beginning level; in middle and high school, speaking had the largest percentage. The pattern of language proficiency for nearly all LEP student subgroups was similar to the pattern in the overall LEP population. Generally, the largest percentage of LEP students was at the early fluent or fluent proficiency level, and the smallest percentage was at the beginning level.
- Some LEP student subgroups had achievement patterns that differed from the pattern of the overall LEP student population. In each grade span, more female LEP students than male LEP students scored at the early fluent or fluent level. Except in kindergarten, students new to U.S. schools within the previous 12 months and students in special education had lower levels of English language proficiency than did other LEP student subgroups.

January 2012

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